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# The Forward Movement in Home Missions

*"Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward."*  
*Exodus 14 : 15.*

A Sermon by  
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of the  
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## FOREWORD

**E**VERY one interested in home missions will be glad to read this sermon, published with Dr. Merrill's consent. Members of the congregation who heard it delivered on the occasion of their recent home mission offering have urged that it be printed and distributed. It is so cogent a presentation of fundamental home mission principles that we are very glad to have the opportunity of giving it to the Church.

Charles L. Thompson.



## THE FORWARD MOVEMENT IN HOME MISSIONS

*"Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward."*

*Exodus 14:15.*

LET me confess at once that I take this text as a motto, rather than as a subject. I shall spend no time over the text itself. Nor shall I say a word, even by way of introduction, about the passage of Scripture from which it comes, or the situation in which Moses and his people were when this stirring summons came from God. Moses was one of the greatest of men, and the movement he led was one of the very few permanently significant movements in human history; but the Word of God reminds us that "a live dog is better than a dead lion." And I covet every minute of the possible sermon time to make more vivid and real to our minds a movement of our own day and place, to arouse your hearts and my own to the call of God, "Speak to the Presbyterians of America, that they go forward, refusing to stop, or to retreat, but going on, in their work for the redemption of the people of America."

Last spring, at the meeting of the General Assembly in Atlanta, I heard Dr. Thompson, the veteran Home Missionary Leader, say, in one of the most thrilling addresses to which I have ever listened, "We will do anything the church tells us to do except one thing. We will go slow, if you tell us to. We will stop, if you say we must. But we will not *back up*. For there are rocks behind as well as ahead, and we might smash our rudder." It is in that spirit that I would try to set before you the Home Mission work of our church, and the right attitude of the members of the church toward it.

I suppose a man of Pauline type would count it a privilege to be allowed to lay before a body of Christian people the needs of any good cause. Paul did not hesitate to close his most doctrinal and

spiritual letters with an appeal for a large offering, nor does he reveal any consciousness of incongruity in passing suddenly from a lofty discussion of immortality with the words, "Now, concerning the collection, brethren." But even an ordinary man, quite unlike Paul in ability to "glory in tribulation," might eagerly welcome the opportunity to let people know how strong and worthy is the work of Home Missions, as our church is planning and attempting to do it. For the plans of our leaders in the Board of Home Missions are farseeing, and their efforts well-directed; and the people of the church do not always realize that the work of Home Missions is far greater, and calls for a larger loyalty, than ever in the past.

Serious and significant changes have lately taken place both in the scope and in the methods of Home Missionary work. In the days of our fathers, that work was comparatively simple and homogeneous. The one great function of the Board was that of distribution. America consisted of a few well-established centres of population, and a great, expanding, growing country. The picture that instinctively stood out before the eye as one heard the words, "Home Missions" was the new town "on the frontier," where men were busy building their homes, their cities, their business enterprises, their scanty resources being wholly needed for these prime requirements. Yet the church of God must get and keep a place in the lives of these people. If they could not maintain churches, the Christian people of the settled districts must help. So the work was organized on the basis of the scripture saying, "He that had much had nothing over; and he that had little did not lack."

That work is still, and probably always will be, a very large part of the enterprise of Home Missions. To plant churches in new communities, to maintain church privileges in communities, whether new or old, which cannot provide them for themselves,—is the primary task of the Home Mission Board.

It has also been the aim of the Home Mission Board, throughout its history, to direct missionary operations among the exceptional elements of our population. The conscience of the white man has always felt a measure of uneasy responsibility for the red man who was dispossessed by our coming to these shores. From the days of Eliot and Brainerd to the present hour the church has felt bound in honor to reach the Indians with the Gospel of Christ. That work also is a permanent element in Home Missionary operations. Indians are increasing rather than diminishing in numbers, and many of them have as yet no contact with the Gospel.

We have responsibilities also toward the mountain-dwellers, whose cramped life needs the freedom of Christian and intelligent preaching; toward the people of Alaska, and the West Indies, and the Spanish-speaking Southwest; toward the masses of men in the logging camps, who can be saved from becoming brutes only by living witnesses among them to the grace of Christ. Our Board of Home Missions is our agent and leader in our attempt to meet all these responsibilities. "If any man see his brother in need, and shutteth up his heart against him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" And, because we are Christians, we believe that the deepest needs are needs of the spirit. We must therefore support, with extreme devotion, a work which is simply our most efficient means of supplying the spiritual needs of the neediest.

But late years have witnessed a significant and serious change in Home Missionary policy. It is not that the old functions have been abandoned. They are being discharged as faithfully as ever. But new phases of effort have been added; and a new sense has awakened of the proper scope and function of the Home Missionary work of the church.

I have said that the word "Home Missions" instinctively called up, to the minds of our fathers, a picture of a frontier town, or a new farming com-

munity, with the missionary walking or riding about, holding little services at scattered points, trying to keep bright the spark of Christian life in the hearts of the farmers or villagers. I suppose some such picture would arise in the minds of many in the church to-day, when the word "Home Missions" was spoken, though some would be carried to the mountains of Carolina or Tennessee, and some to Indian Reservations. But to those who know best the story of recent years of Home Missionary evolution, the word would call up very different pictures. It would take their thoughts to Ellis Island, to the crowded foreign quarters of our great cities, to factories where masses of men labor and dimly grope after principles of industrial and social justice, to rural districts where once religion had its favored dwelling, but now the higher life has fallen asleep. In brief, the word takes us into the thick of the problems of America to-day; the outstanding features of the work of our Board of Home Missions are its Departments of Social Service, of Immigration, of Church and Country Life. More significant even than the appearance of these new objects is the emergence of a new policy, a new conception of the scope and function of the Board which plans and directs the home mission of our church. In former days, the Board of Home Missions was, above all, the distributing center, a reservoir. Its chief functions were to gather and impound the needed financial resources, and then to let them flow wisely and broadly, where they would do the most good. It was the medium of communication between the churches that could give and the churches that needed to receive.

But that conception of the place and function of the Home Mission Board has given way to another. Instead of a mere distributing center, skillful in extracting money from those who have it, and wise in directing its flow to the places that need it most, the Board of Home Missions has become more like the staff of a great army. Its function, as it sees



it, is to direct the church in the Christianizing of our nation. It must find the facts about the national life, must see, and foresee, and make the church see. To that end it must put much of its force and means into study, into setting experts at work, into experiments, into surveys of conditions, investigations, tests. It must be the churches' "Secretary of State for the Home Department;" its task calls for high statesmanship, not for mere skill in distribution. Above all, the church must know what are the facts and factors in the religious problem of America, and how best they can be successfully handled. Traditional methods may be right or they may be wrong; we want to know. And who shall get the information and give it to us, if not the Board in charge of our Home Missionary work?

So has grown up a new consciousness on the part of our Board, a new, and very much more serious, view of its function. In former days the Board seemed to a distant Presbytery a sort of bank, on which it might draw to supplement its own resources, that its weak churches might have their necessary deficits made up. Now the Board stands as an adviser, ready to co-operate with a Presbytery, or a Synod, in facing the problems there to be met, studying conditions, making necessary experiments, and attempting a scientific solution of the real religious problems of that territory. Of course the Board stands, and always must, as the means whereby the stronger churches play brother to the weaker, the distributing center through which needed funds flow to needy churches. But above that function is rising the new conception of the mission of the Board, to lead the church into scientific management of Christian work, into concentration and efficiency, to plan comprehensively for the whole country, to study present conditions. Such a Board, leading in religious policy, may find it wise to appoint and employ men who do nothing directly in the way of evangelization, or of helping churches in their regular work, but who study

conditions, form plans, make experiments, arouse sentiment, enlighten the mind of the church as to the facts of our national life. It may find it wise to expend the main part of its resources in such constructive statesmanship rather than in the planting and maintenance of churches. It will discover, and uncover, the problem of the down-town city church in an alien community, and will spend thousands of dollars in an experiment like the Labor Temple, turning over the work, when shown to be a success, to the local Presbytery. It will attempt new methods of work among foreigners, by grouping foreign parishes under American leaders, by fellowships enabling young men to spend months in the foreign land from which large bodies of our citizens come, that they may return and work the more intelligently and sympathetically among the men and women of the races so studied. It will seek points of contact between the church and the laborers. It will set men investigating and agitating with regard to the problem of rural life, that we may not only maintain churches in sparsely settled communities, but make them efficient and powerful in the daily life of the people. These things, and many others, it will do. Yet no one of these is essential. The essential thing is that the Board shall be a leader in the positive, constructive, statesman-like facing of actual problems, that it shall be ready to tell the church what experiments are worth making, what risks are worth taking, what must be done first, what path is best to take if the church would reach most surely the goal of an evangelized America.

Now, friends, is not that the sort of agency we want our Home Board to be? Is it not a far better and worthier conception of the functions of the churches' organization of its Home Missionary work than the old, simple idea of a distributing center, a money-getter and money-spender on pre-determined and traditional lines? In every department of life, men are awakening to the fact that the day of haphazard has gone, that

organizations content to drift and dribble and run on in old grooves and ruts are doomed. We should welcome in the church the dawn of a consciousness that the times demand constructive planning and leadership. There should be a fresh heartiness, a redoubled support, on our part for a Board that is coming to view its functions with such largeness of outlook, such boldness of spirit, such reality and resoluteness.

If that is our attitude toward the new spirit and policy of our Home Board, then it is time we were giving to the Board such deep and hearty support as we have never given in the past. For the Home Mission work of our church is in a critical position just now. The new policies are threatened. I speak frankly, for it is time the people of the Presbyterian Church were realizing the situation. I am an outsider, and what I say expresses only my personal estimate of the facts and forces that are apparent. But certain of the facts and forces are plain even to an outsider who will give the matter any real attention.

During the past few months and years there has been developed a determined opposition to the modern policies of the Home Board, a reaction bent on forcing the Board back into its old function of intermediary between the churches that have means and the churches that have needs. Such a reaction was inevitable. Men, no less than horses, find it easier to trot in the ruts. The church is, wisely on the whole, conservative, distrustful of radical changes, hard to stir out of accepted ways. Large sections of the country are still in the early stages of growth; their needs naturally seem to them the most urgent of needs. In putting into operation the new policies of investigation and experiment, the Board has found it necessary to spend large sums in great cities, and in work not directly affecting the mass of churches throughout the land. It is inevitable that churches in small places, cramped by lack of funds, should protest, and feel that the Board should return to the simple and sole function of securing and

distributing the money needed for maintaining churches.

The reaction is natural and inevitable; but it is shortsighted, narrow, and wrong. And it makes the demand imperative that those in the Presbyterian Church who see the wisdom and strength of the new spirit and policy of the Board, should give to the work just at the present moment a loyalty, such as they have never before shown. The attack on the Board by the enemies of its present policies was sharp and determined at the last Assembly. It has been renewed during the year. The battle must be fought out at the next Assembly. It is time that all who believe in going forward, all who want to see the church move out of small shop-keeping into statesmanship, all who long for a church big enough to meet the religious needs of this great country of ours, should fall in behind the men who stand for the larger vision and the bigger work in our Home Mission Board. In such a crisis, our offering becomes far more than an offering; it is a vote of confidence, an answer of readiness to the God who calls us to move forward.

I have not attempted to present to you the work our Home Mission Board is doing, to speak of details, to tell stories, to give statistics. There is very much worth telling about our work among the Indians, and on the frontier. There are notable facts about the work among immigrants, close at hand. There are striking and far-reaching results. A Waldensian Missionary in Italy found by chance last fall a community where 300 people were eager to receive him and the Bible teaching he brought. He traced their awakening back to one man who had been converted in an Italian mission here in New York City, and had "lived by his faith" when he returned to Italy. This is but one of many facts and instances I might have set before you, as justifying the appeal of this work to your liberal support. But the appeal of the work lies deeper than statistics, and facts, just now. The question before the church is extreme and radical,

—Shall we, or shall we not, have a Home Mission work worthy of our church, worthy of our country, worthy of our age? Shall our Board be set forward in its strong, farseeing, heroic policy of statesmanship and efficiency, or shall it be set back and confined to its old function of distributing funds for the conventional church operations? Do not misunderstand; I know you will not; no one proposes that the Board shall abandon, or reduce its work of planting and sustaining churches in communities which cannot maintain their own religious work. That must always be the largest work of the church. But this is the issue,—shall the church be content to do this work haphazard and piecemeal, or shall it encourage its Board to become the leader of the church, the pioneer, enabling the church to base its work on known facts, to advance confidently on paths cleared by careful experiments, to see its task comprehensively, intelligently, and then to do it efficiently? That is the issue. And all who believe that God is in facts, that He works through laws, that He honors and uses most the men who strive to serve Him with mind and soul and strength, that the great need of our day and country is that the church shall be big enough, far-seeing enough, intelligent enough, to meet with adequate Christian statesmanship the intricate and acute social and religious problems of the America of to-day, must throw every available ounce of their energy and influence on the side of maintaining and expanding the new policies of our Home Mission work.

This is not the main reason why you should give liberally, sacrificially, to the offering to-day. The chief reason is that what you give means that men will hear the Gospel who otherwise would not hear it, that churches will be opened in communities that would otherwise remain godless, that worship will be maintained in little centers where it would cease if you did not give, that without your gifts, camps of men in the forests of the northwest would remain in sodden, coarse monotony, unrelieved by the grace of the

Gospel; that great sections of our large cities, where foreigners congregate, would be left without the uplift of the free grace of our Protestant Christianity. Your failure to give would mean that you are indifferent to the great command, "Go and make disciples of all nations;" indifferent to it in the case of the nation that is nearest to you and means the most. These are the deep and great reasons why you should give your best and utmost to-day. But to these deep and permanent reasons is added another, of immediate and sharp urgency,—the fact that your support this year means confidence in the big, heroic, Christian plans and policies and spirit of our Board. This offering is your chance to "come to the help of the Lord against the mighty," to set the influence of this church decisively on the side of the forward movement, and against the backward movement. James Russell Lowell caught a gleam of the true meaning of Christ and His Gospel when he spoke of "the cross that turns not back." We must take up that cross, and carry it forward in our own land, daring harder tasks, making bigger plans, looking further into the real facts and forces of our national life, and resolutely believing that the Gospel of Christ is the one force adequate to solve the problems, and meet the needs, of this or any age; and that the church is here to prove the wisdom of God and the power of God in bringing America to Christ. In that spirit, knowing that we are called to the more extreme devotion because some do not see the facts as we do, let us make our offering to Almighty God for the work of the Presbyterian Church in the redemption of our own country.





